

From: Sean Bell
To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Microsoft Settlement

As a long-time user of personal computer products (dating all the way back to the pre-Microsoft era), it seems to me that the principle goal in the Microsoft trial should be the re-establishment of a competitive market for operating systems and core software (ie, Office-like applications, browsers, and email clients). The key to this is an open standard to which developers can write, a sort of lingua franca for programmers. This standard already exists, in the form of the Windows Application Programming Interface (API), but the standard is NOT open. The Windows API is defined by Microsoft, and though large parts of it are made public (it is, after all, how programmers are able to craft products to run on Windows at all), other key components are almost certainly kept secret, to be exploited by Microsoft's own development teams. Keeping this information proprietary provides Microsoft with a non-competitive advantage when it comes to writing applications which run on top of Windows, and also prevents anyone else from writing an operating system which will respond appropriately to API calls made by others' applications.

BUT, if the court were to order (and enforce) the opening of the Windows API, Microsoft would find itself playing on the same field as other software developers. While they would still enjoy an enormous advantage as the original creators of the API, in the long run other developers would at least have a chance to fully learn the API, contribute to its future expansion, and possibly provide some real competition to Microsoft in not only the applications arena, but in the operating system market, as well. That is the goal, right?

Thanks for your consideration. I am sure you have heard, and will hear, a great number of suggestions which run along similar lines to this one, hopefully much more fully fleshed out. I simply want to add another vote for real reorganization, as opposed to some kind of basically meaningless financial penalty. The future of digital technology, which contains so much promise, is in my opinion largely contingent upon the recreation of an open, furiously innovative, market. A slap on the wrist, even a hard one, will not accomplish this. An open API will.

Cheers,

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